

As with every Reggio conference, there's so much to take in and remember. Here's a collection of a few things that stood out during the 2017 conference – some insights, some questions, many notes-to-self. Credit for the thoughts captured here goes to our speakers – Marina Castagnetti, Harold Göthson, Thandi Chaane, Mathapelo Mathibela, Lauren Howden-Cross, Lindi Bell, Nneamaka Enechi.

### #1: Even our mistakes have value

Learning requires risk. We – children and teachers – need the space to try, to make mistakes, without fear. This is how we learn. If we were all perfect, all the time, there would be no room for growth. Nothing new to discover.

### #2: It's about learning to live with discomfort

Vygotsky writes about zones of proximal development, the space between what we know and what we don't know (but could get to know with a bit of guidance). The Reggio Emilia approach constantly asks us as teachers to step into places where we don't know and we aren't the expert. And this can be a place of deep discomfort. However, these are places where something new can come into being, where children's wishes and curiosity emerge. Sometimes you have to step into the dark to be able to see the light more clearly.

### #3: Beauty is not just a backdrop

The spaces we live in and learn in are not simply a background or a container. They represent us, and the image we have of children. If we arrange and design them with care and attention, we can foster interaction, autonomy, exploration, curiosity and communication. Beauty is instructive.

### #4: It's about process, not product

As Carla Rinaldi once said, "There's nothing more practical than a good theory, and there is nothing more theoretical than a good practice". Understanding children's thinking, and not just evaluating the end result, gives us insights into the incredible effort and depth of thought that goes into children's activities. It's why we document, why we pay such close attention to what they're saying and doing and thinking and making. It's not just about appreciating the beautiful things children make, but appreciating the beautiful and complex thoughts that they think.

### #5: Teachers have the right to learn

Research is not just an attitude or a way of life. It's also a right, and not just for children, but for teachers too. I'm always struck by how much Reggio Emilia invests in its teachers, and how central professional development is to the approach. What if we invested in our own learning and development in the same way we invested in the learning and development of children?

### #6: Ours is a deeply democratic project

Our schools are little labs for democracy – research projects on how we can live together better. If education is closed behind school walls, it becomes blind and deaf. So too with democracy. It's a living thing, which we tend and nurture – and to survive, it needs to be open to others. How can we practice democracy and community better together? There are no easy answers, but it's a powerful question worth asking ourselves over and over again.

### #7: Start big, start little, but start

I continue to be humbled and inspired by the example of local educators, who start where they are, with what they have – and transform their classrooms and their schools step by step and little by little. They say the journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. And what beautiful journeys and incredible distances you manage to take and make, by going one step at a time. Keep going.